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It's lovely out here: how we (self) published in the open

Jane Secker / April 13, 2018 / [guest post](#), [Resources](#)



(<https://ukcopyrightliteracy.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/leo-havemann.png>). (<https://ukcopyrightliteracy.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/sarah-sherman.png>) In this post, Sarah Sherman and Leo Havemann share how they published a free, open access ebook based on work they had completed during a two year project. Here, they offer their tale as a guide to publishing openly. Sarah ([@BLE1](https://twitter.com/BLE1) (<https://twitter.com/BLE1>)) has worked in the field of e-learning for over 18 years and currently manages the BLE. A Senior Fellow of the HEA, Sarah is also a certified member of the Association for Learning Technology (CMALT), a Trustee of ALT and a Fellow of the Centre for Distance Education. She also

coordinates a number of regional, national and international special interest groups in e-learning. Leo ([@leohavemann](https://twitter.com/leohavemann) (<https://twitter.com/leohavemann>)) joined Birkbeck in 2008 as a Learning Technologist, having previously been a teacher in HE, a librarian in FE and IT analyst in industry. While developing technology-enhanced learning and teaching at Birkbeck, he also collaborates with colleagues in the BLE and beyond via the ALT M25 Learning Technology Group and the Open Education Working Group and is currently a postgraduate research student at the Open University. Over to them.....

Context

The [Bloomsbury Learning Environment](http://www.ble.ac.uk/) (<http://www.ble.ac.uk/>) (BLE) is a shared e-learning service comprising six London-based HEIs. The BLE brokers shared software licences for learning technologies for its members, organises staff development events and manages collaborative projects. In 2014, the BLE directed its attention to the ways in which learning technologies can enhance and support assessment and feedback. We wanted to gain an overview of our local practices, and at the same time uncover and share examples of people making use of learning technologies in ways which go beyond the norm of usual practice. Over the two subsequent academic years, we organised a programme of online and face-to-face events, conducted some research, and collected case studies highlighting good practice.

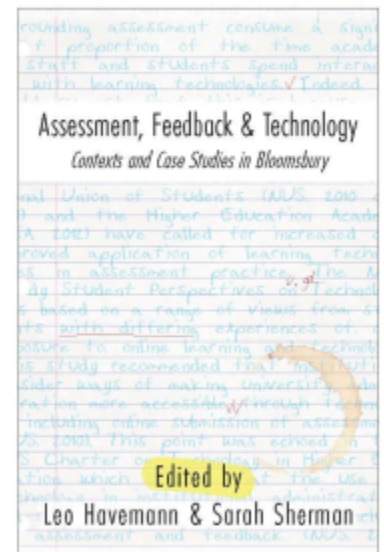
Why write a book?

Unlike academic research, which by default tends to be shared through publishing and conferences, teaching in HE is often seen as a more individual pursuit. In our experience, teaching staff simply don't have much opportunity to find out what their peers are doing in the classroom or VLE. We hadn't originally set out to produce a book as part of the project, as throughout the process we had been gathering and publishing case studies on our project website, but slowly it dawned on us that we actually had sufficient material to put together an edited collection. We felt that producing and launching a book would provide a way of declaring the project complete and getting more attention for the authors who had generously contributed these insights into their practice. We also felt that a book might be viewed as more scholarly by the academics whose practice we wanted to develop. Therefore, we decided to collate all the written outputs from our project into a single volume, which we also chose to publish as a freely available, open access ebook entitled **Assessment, Feedback and Technology: Contexts and Case Studies in Bloomsbury** (<http://www.ble.ac.uk/ebook>).

What did we include?

The ebook contains over 20 chapters, which were contributed by academics, learning technologists, administrators and consultants, bringing a variety of perspectives to the topic. Following the editorial introduction (written by us at the very end of the process), the first three chapters are longer research papers produced during the project, which capture macro-level snapshots of current practice across the BLE partner institutions. Each paper stands alone as a distinct piece of research but together, they offer a good sense of the assessment and feedback landscape in Bloomsbury.

During the project, we also collected 21 pedagogic and three technical case studies from our colleagues to share their practice; to aid the collection and coherence of these, we had developed a case study template consisting of headings and prompts. This ensured they were roughly similar in length and more importantly, addressed a standard set of questions. Once the case studies had been written, they were peer reviewed by members of the project team (most of whom were also case study authors).



(<https://ukcopyrightliteracy.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/sarah-and-leo-image-of-book-2.png>).

Image licensed under CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 by Sonja Grussendorf, 2017

How did we produce our book – and what help did we need?

You might think, as we did, that since all the chapters of the book were (more or less) complete, there is little else remaining for editors to worry about. This is not the case, at least not if you are publishing it yourself. For about 6 months after the project itself had closed, we slowly worked on pulling all the content together into one giant Google Document and editing it during quieter times. Ideally, the process would have been faster, perhaps with the eventual publication coinciding with the close of the project, but as we hadn't initially planned on publishing a book we hadn't allocated time within the project to do this. Without dedicated time of our own, or other dedicated project resources, we appealed to the better nature of various colleagues and friends for help at different times. Sonya Powney, Elizabeth Charles, Dawn Marsh, Sarah Turner, Nicola Proudfoot and David Hipple kindly proofread, copy-edited and formatted the text into a presentable and printable state.

We were grateful for the artwork used as the front cover that our friend Sonja Grussendorf created for us. We were really lucky that not only is Sonja a talented artist, she is also a learning technologist based at LSE, so really understood what the book was attempting to achieve.

What was our budget?

We didn't really have a budget! Our proofreaders (Sonya, Elizabeth and Dawn), copy editors (Sarah and Nicola) and cover artist (Sonja) worked for free out of the goodness of their hearts. We were able to pay two days of consultancy to David just before publication to sort out the design, layout and typography, ensuring it was in a presentable state to be released (it had been less presentable than we had realised!). But David worked for much longer than this and we were very grateful for his commitment and enthusiasm. We launched the book in October 2017 at an event hosted at one of the BLE member institutions, so we were not charged a room booking fee. We sought sponsorship to fund the catering from a commercial vendor (Panopto), which was referenced in several of the chapters, and we offered them the platform to say a few words about the topic of the book. They also wrote a post on their own [blog](https://www.panopto.com/blog/using-video-for-student-assessment-at-birkbeck-university-of-london/) (<https://www.panopto.com/blog/using-video-for-student-assessment-at-birkbeck-university-of-london/>), discussing one of our case studies.

How did we make it available?

At the same time as producing an Open Access (OA) book, we also envisaged our book as an Open Educational Resource (OER) for the wider education community; we did not want to charge readers nor did we wish to charge anyone for work conducted under our employment. Also, we felt we would make a greater impact if the publication was a free download, and as such, we applied a Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial – No Derivatives licence (**CC-BY-NC-ND** (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>) **4.0** (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>) – you can see the range of CC licence options at <https://creativecommons.org/choose/> (<https://creativecommons.org/choose/>)). We added the licence to the copyright page of the book (for more information about the 'front matter' of books, see <https://www.thebookdesigner.com/2012/02/self-publishing-basics-how-to-organize-your-books-front-matter> (<https://www.thebookdesigner.com/2012/02/self-publishing-basics-how-to-organize-your-books-front-matter/>)).

We chose this particular licence as we felt that we wanted to make our work available to be freely downloaded and distributed, always attributed to us as editors and individual chapter authors (BY), but remaining in its original form without being amended, remixed or repurposed without gaining our express permission first (ND), and we didn't want anyone attempting to sell the book or part of it (NC). Licensing decisions are sometimes hotly debated in the OER community as it is felt by some that the application of ND and NC elements to a work renders it much less open, and part of the ethos of OER is that resources should be adaptable. We felt that here however, in this case of a collection of authored papers, that it is not the book or paper itself we are inviting someone to adapt, but the ideas contained within it.

We uploaded our final version – a pdf file – onto Figshare, an open, online repository which enables users to “make all of their research outputs available in a citable, shareable and discoverable manner” (see: <https://figshare.com/about> (<https://figshare.com/about/>)). Importantly, Figshare provides each

item uploaded with a DOI (Digital Object Identifier), which uniquely identifies an output and provides “a persistent link to its location on the Internet” (see <http://www.apastyle.org/learn/faqs/what-is-doi.aspx> (<http://www.apastyle.org/learn/faqs/what-is-doi.aspx>)). We thought about getting an ISBN but this didn't seem necessary for our purposes.

We also investigated uploading the book to Amazon (using [Kindle Direct Publishing](https://kdp.amazon.com/) (<https://kdp.amazon.com/>)). Once we worked out how to tweak the table of contents according to the instructions provided, we found the book converted serviceably into Kindle format. We therefore added a version of the book but were disappointed to learn that we couldn't make it free; the minimum possible price is 99p. At various times, a special ‘promotional’ period allows the book to be free. So, although the book is available via [Amazon](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Assessment-Feedback-Technology-Contexts-Bloomsbury-ebook/dp/B074VBZ4F6/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1522749707&sr=8-1&keywords=havemann+and+sherman) (https://www.amazon.co.uk/Assessment-Feedback-Technology-Contexts-Bloomsbury-ebook/dp/B074VBZ4F6/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1522749707&sr=8-1&keywords=havemann+and+sherman), we do not promote this version.

As a dedicated ‘home page’ for the book, we created a page on the BLE website with a simple URL (<http://www.ble.ac.uk/ebook> (<http://www.ble.ac.uk/ebook.html>)) to provide additional information about the content. One of the advantages of hosting the book on Figshare was the option to embed the platform's content viewer on our own site, which we did. We therefore referenced the book's home page in all publicity in promotion in order to drive readers to download the Figshare version, enabling us to keep track of the numbers of views, downloads and (eventually) citations. That said, we also uploaded the book into all the BLE institutional repositories and onto academic social network sites (academia.edu and ResearchGate), to increase visibility.

How did we promote and publicise it?

Publicity and promotion was conducted under a variety of methods: we sent a press release to all the participating institutions in the BLE in order to have announcements on the institutional newsletters and/or websites, and we wrote [a post for the Birkbeck Research blog](http://blogs.bbk.ac.uk/research/2017/10/09/assessment-feedback-and-technology-a-new-open-access-book-from-the-bloomsbury-learning-environment/) (<http://blogs.bbk.ac.uk/research/2017/10/09/assessment-feedback-and-technology-a-new-open-access-book-from-the-bloomsbury-learning-environment/>). We then posted to Twitter (using relevant hashtags), the BLE blog and emailed mailing lists to get the word out. Over the past six months, we have presented at various conference and events – internal and external. We have also been invited by several institutions (including international) to talk about the book and its content.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, there have been over 1,600 views and 1,100 downloads of the Figshare version alone. Our book acknowledges the inspiring work of our colleagues but also contributes to the wider discussion in the education community regarding improvements to assessment and feedback. Most of all, we hope the collection will be of interest to learning practitioners who are curious to learn about and develop new assessment approaches. We would absolutely consider writing (and publishing) another book in the same way, but would schedule firmer deadlines. Hindsight is valuable; now we've done it once, we are sure it will be much easier to repeat. Well, easier...

We published this post partly because we have been interested in the idea of publishing an open textbook on different aspects of copyright literacy, so it was great to hear from Sarah and Leo about their experiences. Our ideas are still in the early stages, but if you are interested in working with us on such a project then do let us (<https://copyrightliteracy.org/contact/>) know and we'll be putting out a more formal call when our ideas are a bit more fully formed, probably in early 2019.

[#Assessment](#), [#edtech](#), [#Feedback](#), [#OERs](#), [#open textbooks](#)

Published by Jane Secker

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